



THE GANG FACTORIES: FROM STREET URCHIN TO CRIMINAL



STREET BOYS LEARNING A NEW PASTIME

One Who Has Studied Gang Problem Deeply Tells of Genesis of Bands of Crooks.

By Edwin Newdick.

GANGS are the biggest factor in the crime problem in New York. It is the gangs which have made possible the systematizing of crime and the wholesale blackmail and terrorizing by criminals. How does the gang form? From what sources is it recruited? How do gangsters, "gunmen," make their living? What are gangsters like? What is the significance of the gang? These are important questions with interesting answers.

Boys of the street, like all others, have their heroes. Recently a lad was in a Middle Western hospital, and his life was despaired of. Johnson, the noted pitcher, was the boy's idol. Johnson heard of the boy's hero worship of him and, though he had never before heard of the boy, sent him a baseball used by the famous pitcher with a letter hoping the boy would soon be able to use the ball. The boy got well cured by his hero's kindness. A strong element in the influences which make a gangster is often the boy's emulation of his hero. When the boy is ten years old or so he sees this strong, sleek, at-ease-looking young man, who whistles away his time as for whom the world works. The boy does an errand for his big, idle idol, who tosses him a liberal reward with heroic nonchalance. The younger one sees that the older one has a masterful way and that others respect his prowess. The boy gains the gangster's acquaintance, follows him into some of his haunts—poolroom, social club, gambling joint or saloon back room—doing small errands.

The boy dramatizes the dreams his hero awakes in him; he adopts a fearless swagger, a threatening frown, carries ready fists and demands tribute of petty servitude from his playmates. One day, when he bullies a boy to tears, the father of the oppressed one threatens to take swift vengeance, but the gangster-hero, known and feared in the neighborhood, steps in and, with a word, silences the angry parent and rescues his young admirer. A new boldness is henceforth the boy's, a new allegiance to his hero and a closer alliance with the corner gang. With pride the boy finds his own reputation and the fear he inspires growing.

IN THE BASEMENT POOLROOM.

In the basement poolroom where he hangs about his hero the boy learns much. He sees how the gambling pool rackets are played and gets hungry to learn; he sees the crap game going on each Saturday evening and teaches the other young boys on the street the latest phrases, the most dramatic gestures of the arm and the loudest snap of the fingers in rolling the dice. Thus the boy adds to his own prestige already gained as a bully and becomes himself a gang leader in a small way, as his model is in a larger way. When the baseball game or snowball fight with the boy gang from a few blocks over develops into an encounter of fists and brickbats, he shows distinguishing daring and is a leader in the fights which grow into a feud-like series.

Our prospective gangster is fourteen, and gets his working papers. He has no trade—the city doesn't teach him one. He gets a job for \$4 a week as errand boy, wrapping bundles, or some such work. If he sticks to his job with only ordinary conscientiousness and ability, he will be getting \$8 when he is sixteen or seventeen. When he asks for another raise the boss lets him go and gets another boy of fourteen for \$4. What kind of job can the seventeen-year-old youth get? He's too old to work for \$4 or so, he's worth little more than he is at fourteen, he isn't old enough to take a man's job at manual labor, and has no preparation for any job except the preparation he is getting through his acquaintance with the corner gang.

Whether or not he gets another \$6 or \$8 job doesn't determine his outcome. If he gets the job, he plays "crap" with the other fellows on the corner some Saturday night and loses his pay. He tells the folks at home, to whom he gives each week a few dollars for the house, that the bookkeeper was too late for the bank and that the boss will pay off on Monday. Before Monday night he raises some money, probably by borrowing from one of the gang fellows, who helps him repay by instructing him how to do a little job for "easy money," for which he develops a taste.

The youth's personal introduction to easy money may come in one of many ways. He may do some odd job for a



gambling house; he may help out "the house" at a crap or "stuss" game; he may be put to shadowing a truck driver from whom it is planned to steal; he may be used for a "fantail job" (if he is small he can be put through a transom and thus assist at burglary); he may be a "tout" to give "straight tips" on the races to prospective victims who are playing the horses; he may be taught to help out in pickpocket work by some "Fagin" who treats him or loans him money to get a hold on the boy; he may be good at handling himself and get \$5 for fighting a bout at some social club. Whatever the chance for easy money that he finds, it will give him closer acquaintance with gang members and methods. If he is a bright, willing fellow, he finds an opening to enter a gang trade—an opening which promises more money than any chance he can expect to find in the legitimate field—and his whole life on the street has better fitted him for entering gang work than anything else.

The taste of easy money nourishes the gambling instinct. Hard work and slow, laborious advance in prosperity by parsimonious economy and abstinence from pleasure do not seem worth while to the fellow who has tasted easy money. Gam-



BOYS LEARNING TO GAMBLE SHOOTING CRAPS FOR PICTURE CARDS

WHAT OUGHT TO BE EXPECTED OF BOYS WHO MUST PLAY UNDER THESE CONDITIONS?



USING A GUN FROM A POCKET WITH A HOLE IN THE LINING; FAVORITE METHOD OF "LEFTY LOUIS" AND OTHER DISTINGUISHED GANGSTERS

How Street Arabs Are Moulded Into Criminals—Antidotes for Gang Influence.

ment, so that the inside can't be seen from the street.

"Stuss" is played thus: One is dealer; the other makes a bet that a card of a certain denomination or suite will turn up first on the bettor's pile; the dealer deals, face up, one card alternately to himself and the bettor. The bettor loses if a card of the denomination or suit he chose appears on the dealer's pile first, or appears on both piles when there is the same number of cards in each. The dealer is usually working for the "house." It is often arranged so that the bettor has all he wants to drink lest he notice deft dealing from the bottom of the pack or dealing of two cards when a winning card for the bettor is on top. Young fellows have ample opportunity to learn this game and to play it if they want to and have the money.

A player can't "go broke" at "stuss," which adds to its attraction. There's "viggrish"; this is the 10 per cent of his money which is always returned to the loser at "stuss."

SPECIALIZING IN CRIME.

Suppose a youth to be a gangster in a small way. He must find some way of making a more or less regular living. That is not very hard. He develops as a specialist in one line or another. It may be as a pickpocket, that is, as one of a pickpocket squad. There are few "lone men" working now, as will be explained more fully in a coming article on the pickpocket "trust." The young gangster may start in at petty thievery, become one of the "staff" of a "fence" (receiver of stolen goods) and work up to burglary; or the "fence," or the "fagin" for the "fence," may assign him to work with a squad of package or truck thieves; he may do apprentice work now and then for a "juice man" for a gambling house or other illegitimate enterprise, his duty being to bring business to the place employing him.

The young gangster will levy tribute, beginning in a very small way with the pushcarts and stores in the vicinity. He will get political "work" during primary and election seasons. All the time he is adding to his reputation as a "strong arm guy" by little deeds of violence, little acts of crime. His growing reputation makes possible easier collections and larger tribute. With others of his gang he begins to collect from illegitimate businesses—saloons with annexes, cigar stores with gambling attached, larger gambling places and vice houses—to whom either protection is given from raids of other gangsters or tribute levied as the price of leaving the places unmolested. Fights between gangs grow, often, out of these collections from illegitimate businesses. One gang has raided a place which another gang has under its protection, so the second goes out to punish the first and the fight results.

A NOTORIOUS GANGSTER.

Some facts from the life of Nathan Kaplan show how a gangster may develop. His parents were honest and hard-working poor people who lived in Grand street. The father peddled, and the mother was janitress of the tenement house to help on the rent of the three rooms in which the family lived. When Nathan was a little over fourteen he got a job as "tail boy" riding on the back of a department store wagon to prevent the theft of packages. He got \$5 a week. Nathan frequented the hangout at the corner of Monroe and Jefferson streets. On pay nights he gave \$5 to his mother and played craps with the other \$2.

Nathan got acquainted with Charlie Newman, leader of the Charlie Newman gang, and prominent in a social club on East Broadway (a club in which a well known detective, now with a private agency, and a well known politician who made that detective took a great interest, Newman was arrested often, but seemed always to beat the cases. Newman saw that Kaplan was a strong young fellow and showed Kaplan how to make a few dollars boxing occasionally, though Kaplan was still working. Kaplan had a beautiful punch—he hit so hard and got such a reputation for "dropping" his op-

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THE SALOON IS ONE OF THE GANGSTERS' FAVORITE HANGOUTS

bling is one of the worst influences for the young lad, for it gives him a taste of a hunger for, easy money before he is wise enough to realize that the gambling method is a delusion.

The street crap game is the preparatory school for many a gangster. Any evening or Sunday when the weather is pleasant you can see groups of youths in the street, crowded closely in a circle; the inner row will be squatting or stooping over, perhaps, some with bills held ostentatiously between their fingers; money is scattered on the pavement between them and one is throwing the dice; in the outer row stand spectators and those who have withdrawn from the game, losers. Little boys often watch the older fellows play.

The poolroom is a bad influence. There are over two hundred poolrooms on the lower East Side (south of 14th street and east of the Bowery). The prevailing

prices are a cent and a half and a half in a minority. There is gambling in practically every social club. In many cases the club couldn't pay expenses otherwise a large part of the income being from "cutting the kitty" for the house out of every game played. But young men, with gamblers, if they learn gambling as boys and like it, and there are many worse places for them to waste their time and money than in their own clubrooms. It's a costly pastime, though. A fellow can't win and he can't come out even—he must lose. If four fellows play and have to lose \$20 the house will have the whole twenty if they play long enough, just by taking "kitty" from the game. Nor is that all. If a young man wins \$10 this Saturday night he blows \$5 of it; if he loses \$10 next Saturday night, he figures that he is "even with the game." He isn't; he's really out \$5.

"Social club" sounds innocent, but the young men's social clubs are an important link in the chain that leads from boyhood to crime. There are good ones, as

there are good poolrooms, but both are in a minority. Here is a training school for young men in a profession which is not likely to help them to be good citizens. Often it is capability as a boxer which gives a young chap the opportunity to be a full-fledged gang member. He becomes a "starker," a "strong arm guy," or, in popular parlance, a "gunman." He adopts the profession of violence. He eventually becomes one of a gang protecting this and that gambling place and house of prostitution. All of these must have their protectors, for hostile gangs consider such places as legitimate prey, swoop down upon them and levy tribute. The "starker" is hired occasionally as a strike-breaker, or to "protect" strike-breakers, or to intimidate strike-breakers (both sides resort to the use of "strong arm" men, so business for the gangs is good during labor troubles).

The social club is the source of bad influence in another way. It gives the po-

leading gangster and furnish part of his income; others are virtually private hangouts of a gang and its intimate friends; but most of the social clubs have few, if any, bona fide gangsters among their members. All of these clubs are, however, recruiting stations for the army of "pull" politics, and many so-called social clubs are really political clubs in so far as they are anything beside hangouts and gambling houses. There is also the out-and-out political club. There is probably not one of these latter where there is not gambling more or less regularly.

Then there are the "stuss" places. Simplicity is the great advantage of "stuss." Two can play and only a pack of cards is needed. This is a popular form of gambling for the rear of cigar stores, where there may or may not be a pool table or two. Usually the show window in the front of one of these places has a window display, curtain or some other arrange-

ment, so that the inside can't be seen from the street.

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